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ABSTRACT

A study examined how Alabama legislators' ratings of news media for job-relevant information correlate with their views on news media adversary and consensus agent roles. Eighty-two questionnaires (out of 140 mailed) were completed by Alabama state representatives and senators for a return rate of 59%. Results suggested that lawmakers who believe news media do adversarial reporting are more unlikely or unwilling to credit them with providing useful job-relevant information, while lawmakers who do use news media for job-relevant information were significantly less likely to describe those media as engaging in aggressive, watchdog reporting. Results also indicated that the belief that news media function as agents of community consensus is correlated with use of media, thus making it possible for those media to serve as constituent-legislator links. Results suggest an interesting consequence of the adversary posture many news media take: that stereotyping of news media as adversaries may preclude the news media from serving what could be an important "linkage" function. (Four tables of data and 38 notes are included.) (SR)

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News Media Adversary and Consensus Roles, and Legislator Use of News Media for Job Information

by

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Submitted for presentation at the annual convention of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, Washington, D.C., 1989.

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News Media Adversary and Consensus Roles, and
Legislator Use of News Media for Job Information

Legislators have often reported that news media are relatively unimportant sources of job-related information because of specialized information needs created by highly technical or complex issues or bills.[1] Used more often for decision information[2] are purposive[3] but readily available and familiar "insider" sources (lobbyists,[4] expert colleagues[5] or committee members).[6]

Mayors, city administrators[7] and Washington officials also credit media coverage with only a minimal impact on the decisions they make.[8]

Still, one might anticipate regular use of the news media as sources of other kinds of less technical, non-decision but job-related information: e.g., to track public sentiment and learn "which way the wind is blowing" in the statehouse.

After all, Dunn saw the press as an "instant poll" serving "a substantial linkage function" by providing news of public thinking[9] and enabling Congressmen "to order their priorities."[10] Cook et al. described similar impact of media coverage of public opinion.[11] Others call the news media "opinion-to-policy linkage mechanisms"[12] tying electorate to elected,[13] and transmitting "the systemic agenda of community concerns."[14]

Moreover, Dunn described state officials tracking their own agencies in the press,[15] and Matthews[16] and Key described Washington officials using the press to keep up with "the sprawling federal establishment."[17]

Yet a recent Alabama legislator study showed news media ranked fourth (of eight) as sources of job-decision information and no better than third for non-decision professional information needs--tracking capital or statehouse activities, learning about local constituent concerns and monitoring public opinion. News media were eclipsed by "insiders" ("family, friends, non-professional contacts"; "colleagues, fellow legislators"; and "lobbyists") "whose impartiality,

from the public's point of view, is by definition suspect." The author asked whether ease of use or time constraints are sound reasons for lawmakers to turn to these purposive insiders, rather than the news media, "an institution which claims legitimacy and privilege because it does identify and communicate the problems and concerns of society."[18]

The lukewarm ratings for news media across all four information types suggest that there may be more influencing these ratings than the complaint that news media don't provide the highly specialized or technical job decision information legislators need.

The general, and fairly simple, proposition advanced here and guiding the present study is that legislators' views of the role being performed by the news media may affect use of news media as information sources. This paper examines how Alabama legislators' ratings of news media for job-relevant information correlate with their views on news media adversary and consensus agent roles.

Consistent with the objective of the study, two specific research hypotheses and rationales were:

H_1: Legislator belief that the news media are functioning as adversaries is negatively correlated with perceived usefulness of news media for job-relevant information.

Tradition and public imagination,[19] professional journalists, and the public official culture[20] have long maintained an adversary conception of news media. Implicitly, the press--as public surrogate--must be an aggressive watchdog on government. Though critics may question the "watchdog" label,[21] a legislator viewing the news media negatively--as opponents--is unlikely to use those foes for job-relevant information.

Cohen argued that policy makers take "more out of the press than any one of them readily admits to, or may even be aware of."[22] In fact, in a study of reported frequency of use of information sources by Indiana legislators, newspapers ranked fairly high.[23] Obviously, most news of public events and affairs

can be obtained only via the news media.

Yet general antipathy toward the press may make decision makers unwilling to use or give credit to these troublesome adversaries. A long-time foe may be dismissed as useless.

Concern with image or style[24] may preclude acknowledging that a particularly important policy decision might be affected by the mere news media.[25] Florida legislators were "more willing to admit a neutral, surveillance role for the press than a guidance role that usurps prerogatives."[26]

Paradoxically then, media adopting the public surrogate's aggressive posture may diminish their ability to perform as responsive link between public and public servant, or to help legislators keep track of matters in the capital.

H_2: Legislator belief that the news media are functioning as agents of community consensus is positively correlated with perceived usefulness of those news media for job-relevant information.

This view of the press focuses on its role in revealing community conflict and functioning as a forum (e.g., between public and leader or between and among interests) or engine of community consensus.[27] Here the conflicts between groups, issues on the minds of constituents, and problems facing the public are brought to public light.

Too much emphasis on conflict, however, may undermine community cohesiveness, critics argue.[28] But because constituent and public opinion are the focus of news media in this perspective, legislators seeing the news media serving a positive, agent-of-consensus role should find those media useful.

Method

Questionnaires were mailed to Alabama's 140 state representatives and senators. Eighty-two (or 59%) returned questionnaires, with the sample underrepresenting slightly the partisanship of the legislature (73%-18% Democrat-Republican sample distribution vs. true ratio of 83%-11%).[29] Sample respondents ave-

raged nearly 17 years of formal education, seven years of service in elected office, and 45 years of age.

Findings and Discussion

Developing the Measures

Media Usefulness. Usefulness of news media for job-relevant information was self-reported, utilizing statements[30] asking: "To what extent do each of the following provide (one of several information types)?"[31] Each statement was followed by a list of three specific news media (newspapers, television and radio) and "the news media in general." Measurement was via a five-interval scale, with values ranging from "Not at All Useful" to "Very Useful." Mean usefulness ratings are shown in Table One.

A caveat on the measure's validity: the self-reported ratings are only an indirect measure of the lawmakers' actual consulting or searching--or even passive processing--of the media for job-relevant information. Alternative measures of use might provide different results.

Moreover, the information types do not exhaust a legislator's professional information needs. They do tap a range of important needs suggested in the literature: keeping tabs on constituents' concerns, staying in touch with public opinion, discovering "which way the wind is blowing" in the capital or state-house, and making a decision.

While none of the news media enjoyed particularly high ratings, newspapers fared best. As noted, news media fared particularly poorly on job decision information.[32]

But direct comparisons among news media for discrete information types are of minimal importance for this study. Instead, the four information types are viewed as collectively defining the lawmaker's overall concept of job-relevant usefulness.

For each news media source, then, principal components analysis summarized

how the source performed all four information functions. Table One shows that, for each source, the resulting single factor accounted for approximately 60% of variance for that source. A usefulness index for each source based on these factor scores (see below) thus will reflect the proportional contribution a specific information type makes to overall usefulness.

Media Role. Table Two provides agreement scores with the Likert-type items measuring belief that news media are adversaries and consensus agents. Some items were developed for this study, and some adapted from a study of Illinois public officials[33] and from Donahue, Olien and Tichenor's "watchdog scale."[34] Edelstein and Schulz's study of community leader views of the weekly paper's leadership role[35] was also reviewed.

In general, responses to the three adversary items indicated a view of the news media as adversaries. Interpretation of responses to the four consensus agent items is less clear-cut. The lawmakers seemed to view media as serving a forum function ("about the interests and concerns of...leaders and influentials," "the public's concerns," and helping the public "reach a consensus"), but disagreed that the news media do "a good job of presenting both sides."

Principal components analysis was again used to summarize each set of items. Table Three shows that the single factor summarizing each set accounts for approximately 54% of variance.

The Indexes. Four usefulness indexes (one for each source) and two role indexes (adversary, and consensus agent) were constructed. In computing each index, the results of each principal components analysis were used. Each lawmaker's score on an index was calculated, using his/her score on the contributing items and the overall factor score of those items.[36] The benefit of this approach over a simpler summed index (simply adding raw item scores) is that it differentiates among the items that contribute to a factor; items which load

more heavily carry more weight.

(Item scoring was adjusted so that higher index scores would be consistent: i.e., higher values indicate more usefulness, more "adversar-iness," or more of a consensus role).

Although news media could easily function as both politician's adversary and agent of consensus, for this sample the two role indexes were significantly, negatively correlated ($r=-.50$, $p<.001$).

Testing the Hypotheses

The indexes were constructed in order to examine the relationship between legislator view of news media role and use of news media for job-relevant information. Table Four provides the product-moment correlations needed for examining the hypotheses.

H_1 predicted that legislator belief that news media are adversaries would be negatively correlated with perceived usefulness of news media. The hypothesis was supported by significant negative correlations between the adversary index score and three of the four usefulness indexes. Only radio's usefulness rating was unrelated ($r=-.09$, $p>.05$) to view of news media as adversaries.

What do the significant negative correlations for newspapers ($r=-.43$, $p<.001$), television ($r=-.21$, $p<.05$), and news media in general ($r=-.37$, $p<.001$) indicate?

First, they suggest that lawmakers who believe news media do the kind of reporting described in the adversary index are most unlikely or unwilling to credit them with providing useful job-relevant information. This interpretation is consistent with conventional thinking about the pervasiveness of the adversary relationship stereotype among journalists and elected officials; poor usefulness ratings may be more an indication of the extent of a lawmaker's loathing of the press than an indication of actual content utility. An Alabama legislator, in other words, "has no use" for an adversary.

On the other hand, those who do use (three of the four) news media for job-relevant information were significantly less likely to describe those media as engaging in the kind of aggressive, watchdog reporting tapped in the index.

In sum, the adversary posture of the news media--or at least the extent to which that is perceived as their posture--is strongly related to those media's ability to serve the public's elected representatives as a means of monitoring public opinion and of tracking events in the capital. The more aggressive the news media, the less likely the public's delegate will use those media for those information types.

Of course, news media should not serve primarily as data-gathering arms for elected officials. On the other hand, as valuable as the adversary posture is or has been, there are other current imperatives that merit consideration. "Adversariness" may be getting in the way of other functions important to the democratic process that are reflected in items on the usefulness index.

As noted, legislative issues often involve complex technical data. Partisan special interest groups and professional lobbyists have proliferated in order to make such data handily available. And the high stakes, legislative "horse-trading" process demands that a legislator spend a lot of time interacting with other lawmakers.

Beseiged by these sources, how accurate can a legislator's perception of public or constituent concerns be? In the small towns and communities that make up the districts of many legislators, what means does the public have to make itself heard when a lawmaker is not "on the stump"? The news media? Not if they are perceived by the legislator primarily as adversaries.

On the other hand, H_2 predicted that legislator belief that the news media are functioning as agents of community consensus would be positively correlated with perceived usefulness of those news media.

The hypothesis was supported for newspapers ($r=.58$, $p<.001$), television ($r=.28$, $p<.01$), and news media in general ($r=.54$, $p<.001$), but not for radio ($r=.12$, $p>.05$). Belief that media perform the "forum"-role tapped in the consensus items is correlated with use of media.

These relationships are consistent with the discussion of the relationship between extent of media's acting as adversaries and their serving as linkage between electorate and elected, and among elected. A legislator's perception of media acting to resolve conflicts and promote consensus makes it possible for those media to serve better as constituent-legislator links.

On the one hand, the issues and concerns that are spotlighted and revealed and discussed in consensus-agent news media have a purely utilitarian value for an information-seeking legislator. On the other hand, news media are evaluated positively when perceived as acting in such a conflict-reduction role. This perception, like the perception of the aggressive watchdog, could have as much to do with use of news media as actual content utility.

Both hypotheses were supported. The interpretation proffered here has focused on the importance of a lawmaker's perception of the role of the media and use of those media as essential information uplinks from the grassroots.

Although between-media distinctions were not part of the hypotheses, note that the usefulness factor for newspapers is the most clearly defined, with the highest loadings; and that the resulting newspaper usefulness index had the strongest correlations with both role indexes. Alabama's number of television stations is limited, and they are less likely than newspapers to be clearly identified as either adversary or agent of consensus.

Other Correlates of the Indexes

Of course, other factors influence reliance upon news media by legislators. More senior lawmakers, for example, may have more established colleague networks for monitoring statehouse trends. And there are alternatives to media mon-

itoring of constituents, such as close personal contact with voters.

Table Four includes product-moment correlations between the six index scores and several other measures:

Media Orientation: characteristic media use (i.e., print, broadcast, local, cosmopolitan) might influence evaluation of media generally and print or broadcast in particular. Items asked if "yesterday" respondents "read a national or regional newspaper"; "read a local or area newspaper"; "listened to a local radio newscast"; "watched a network evening news program"; or watched a news program "from an area or local station." Print, broadcast, local and cosmopolitan orientations were developed by summing "yes" responses for, respectively, the two newspaper use items (scores ranged from 0 to 2); the three broadcast items (scores ranged from 0 to 3); the three local media items (scores 0 to 3); and the two national media items (scores 0 to 2). Total media orientation summed "yes" responses across all five items (scores ranged 0-5).

Generally, the media orientation measures were most strongly correlated with television and radio usefulness for job-relevant information. The media orientation measures did not correlate significantly with the role indexes.

Constituent Communication Behaviors: The extent to which an elected representative has direct personal contact with constituents would, as suggested earlier, likely diminish use of the news media as a "surrogate constituency,"[37] for constituent or public opinion monitoring. Legislators were asked about frequency of telephone and face-to-face contact in the home district office and at the capital, and about number of constituent letters received weekly.[38]

Measures of face-to-face constituent contact were significantly and negatively correlated with usefulness indexes for newspapers and "news media in general." Those availing themselves of direct constituent contact use these two sources less. Face-to-face contact was positively and significantly correlated

with the adversary index (the more aggressive the media, the more the legislator turned to face-to-face constituent contact), but negatively and significantly with the consensus scale (with greater face-to-face contact offsetting, presumably, the media's failure to air citizen concerns and issues).

Telephone constituent contact, however, was not significantly related to the usefulness indexes, though telephone contact increased when the media were seen as aggressive adversaries and not as agents of consensus. Volume of constituent mail per week was positively and significantly related to usefulness of newspapers, radio and "news media in general," but not to the role indexes.

Demographic and Tenure Variables: Data on age, education, and total years in elected office were collected. While age was positively and significantly correlated with tenure ($r=.44$, $p<.001$), it was negatively and significantly correlated with years of education ($r=-.27$, $p<.01$). In short, the most senior legislators were least-educated.

Among the demographic and tenure variables, only age and years in office were significantly positively correlated with any of the usefulness indexes (newspapers and radio).

Conclusions

As with most single studies, more questions are suggested by these data than are answered. The fact that these data are correlations also suggests further directions for inquiry. For example, how accurate is a legislator's perception of public or constituent concerns, given his/her view on the role and usefulness of news media? Or, are there instances--e.g., at reelection time--when news media may become more useful, or instances--e.g., community turmoil--when news media become more consensus-oriented? Do legislators from districts with competing media perceive greater adversariness or differentiation of adversary and consensus agent roles among those media than legislators from one-newspaper towns? And of course there remain the perhaps unanswerable questions

of if and how quantity, quality and source of information enter into the total "mix" of factors leading to decision making.

Perhaps even more worthy of further discussion is the question of whether the traditional roles ascribed to news media are inviolate, and whether some "functions" traditionally associated with news media merit the preferred position they have enjoyed historically. Although these data admittedly do not reflect an objective perspective on news media performance, it has been the premise of this paper that basic assumptions about these roles and functions are not unquestionable.

There is something troubling about the influence wielded by purposive information sources in the statehouse, far from the home district. The input and concerns of the home district may be forgotten temporarily while a legislator faces the more immediate problems of committee work, technical language in proposed legislation, and making deals.

It is easy enough, and functional, to consult available insiders on some issues. In the capital or the statehouse, lobbyists and committee specialists are "handy references."

Today, the influence of those "handy references" may have expanded well beyond technical decision making. Many of these Alabama legislators even get information about the public and the public's concerns from those same insiders. This despite the fact that lawmakers make extensive use of personal, mail and phone contacts with constituents.

It has not traditionally been the role of the news media to be the "voice of the people," making sure that constituent concerns are heard as frequently and as loudly as the concerns of interested insiders. Historically, publishers published what they chose, and even with a socially responsible press, the focus has been on carrying information to and not from the public. (Much of the

limited literature on legislator "use" of news media focuses on the legislator's ability to use news media to get information to constituents.)

Yet the fact remains that the public's elected representatives do consume news media. And those media do air, however imperfectly, issues and problems--the news--affecting the public. Airing of issues and problems is not just via letters to the editor or via the oft-criticized "man on the street" poll. It also includes news coverage of citizen action meetings, of organized opposition at council meetings, etc.

Of course, some Alabama legislators may be indicating in these data that coverage in some news media is of such low quality as to be essentially "useless." Some news media may not cover concerns of constituents, and may benefit from giving more attention, prominence and editorial resource to covering citizen concerns.

On the other hand, the data here also suggest an interesting consequence of the adversary posture many news media take: that stereotyping of news media as adversaries may preclude the news media serving what could be an important "linkage" function. Conversely, when media are perceived as serving in a forum or agent-of-consensus role, they are more likely to be seen as useful for linking electorate to elected.

Should news media abandon their adversary posture? Probably not. There remain at all levels of government people who would just as soon govern free of press and public scrutiny.

To that end and when those situations arise, the public is well served by an adversary press. However vehement their other complaints about aggressive journalism, most citizens likely endorse a "watchdog" role for the news media when media succeed in uncovering corruption or problems in government.

But to the extent that news media are unable to shake the persistent and perhaps unwarranted perception that they are primarily and unremittingly the

enemies of the representatives of the people, they may be unable to perform a potential linking function that could serve both the public and the public official.

Should the news media "promote themselves" to lawmakers as being more than an unceasing foe? Should they emphasize to lawmakers their ability to provide Dunn's "instant poll" of the grassroots? Again, probably not.

Such public relations with a longtime adversary would be unseemly.

Notes

1. Paul Sabatier and David Whiteman, "Legislative Decision-Making and Substantive Policy Information: Models of Information Flow," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 10:395-421 (1985); and Peter Wissel, Robert O'Connor and Michael King, "The Hunting of the Legislative Snark: Information Searches and Reforms in U.S. State Legislatures," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 1:251-267 (1976).

2. Robert B. Bradley, "Motivations in Legislative Information Use," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 5:393-406 (1980); Sabatier and Whiteman, op. cit.; Raymond A. Bauer, Ithiel de Sola Pool and Lewis Anthony Dexter, American Business and Public Policy: The Politics of Foreign Trade (New York: Atherton Press, 1963); Robert Zwier, "The Search for Information: Specialists and Nonspecialists in the U.S. House of Representatives," Legislative Studies Quarterly, 4:31-42 (1979); and Michael E. Abrams and James E. Hawkins, "Legislators' Perception of Newspaper Functions," Newspaper Research Journal, 5:51-57 (Summer 1984).

3. The purposive vs. non-purposive contrast was authored by Bruce H. Westley and Malcolm S. MacLean Jr., "A Conceptual Model for Communications Research," Journalism Quarterly, 34:31-38 (1957).

4. Malcolm E. Jewell, Representation in State Legislatures (Lexington, Ky.: The University Press of Kentucky, 1982); Harmon Zeigler, "The Effects of Lobbying: A Comparative Assessment," Western Political Quarterly, 22:122-140 (1968); and Lester Milbrath, The Washington Lobbyists (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1963).

5. John Kingdon, Congressmen's Voting Decisions Second Edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1981); Bradley, op. cit.; Zwier, op. cit.; Donald Matthews and James Stinson, Yeas and Nays: Normal Decision-Making in the U.S. House of Representatives (New York: Wiley, 1975); and H. Owen Porter, "Legislative Experts and Outsiders: The Two Step Flow of Communication," Journal of Politics, 36:703-730 (1974).

6. See Zwier, op. cit.; and Richard F. Fenno, Jr., Congressmen in Commit-

tees (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1973).

7. Ellen W. Kanervo, "Community Newspapers and Town Administrators: Policy Agenda Building in Small Towns." Paper presented to the AEJMC Southeast Regional Colloquium, March 1988, Tuscaloosa, Ala.

8. Edmund B. Lambeth, "Perceived Influence of the Press on Energy Policy Making," Journalism Quarterly, 55:11-18 (1978).

9. Delmer D. Dunn, "Differences Among Public Officials in Their Reliance on the Press for Information," Social Sciences Quarterly, 49:829-839 (1969b).

10. Delmer D. Dunn, "Symbiosis: Congress and the Press," in Robert O. Blanchard (ed.) Congress and the News Media (New York: Hastings House, 1974).

11. Fay Lomax Cook, Tom R. Tyler, Edward G. Goetz, Margaret T. Gordon, David Protess, Donna R. Leff and Harvey L. Molotch, "Media and Agenda Setting: Effects on the Public, Interest Group Leaders, Policy Makers, and Policy," Public Opinion Quarterly, 47:16-35 (1983).

12. Cliff Zukin, "Mass Communication and Public Opinion," in Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders (eds.) Handbook of Political Communication (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1981) p. 359.

13. James C. Strouse, The Mass Media, Public Opinion, and Public Policy Analysis: Linkage Explorations (Columbus, OH: Charles E. Merrill, 1975), p. 20; or Robert S. Erickson, Norman R. Luttbeg and Kent L. Tedin, American Public Opinion: Its Origins, Content and Impact 2nd Edition (New York: John Wiley, 1980), pp. 12-15; or Roger W. Cobb and Charles D. Elder, "Communication and Public Policy," in Nimmo and Sanders, op. cit., pp. 391-416.

14. Cobb and Elder, op. cit., p. 392. See also Roger W. Cobb and Charles Elder, Participation in American Politics: The Dynamics of Agenda-Building (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1972); David Weaver and Swanzy Nimley Elliott, "Who Sets the Agenda for the Media? A Study of Local Agenda-Building," Journalism

Quarterly, 62:87-94 (1985); Dan Caspi and Yehiel Limour, "How the Yom Kippur War Affected Israeli Legislators' Media Exposure," Journalism Quarterly, 55:474-480, 493 (1978); and Michael B. Hesse, "A Coorientation Study of Wisconsin State Senators and Their Constituents," Journalism Quarterly, 53:626-633, 660 (1976). Other writers, however, give less emphasis to news media as means of tapping public opinion, and emphasize instead polling, personal contact with constituents and community leaders, mail and phone calls. See: Jewell (1982) op. cit.; Fenno (1978) op. cit.; Bauer, Pool and Dexter, op. cit.; and Dunn (1969b) op. cit.

15. Dunn (1969a) op. cit.

16. Donald R. Matthews, "'Covering' the Senate," in Blanchard (1974) op. cit.

17. V.O. Key, Public Opinion and American Democracy (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1961), p. 405.

18. Daniel Riffe, "Comparison of Media and Other Sources of Information for Alabama Legislators," Journalism Quarterly, 65:46-53 (1988).

19. "Public Finds News Media More Fair Than Accurate," Los Angeles Times, Oct. 11, 1981, p. 1.

20. L. John Martin, "Government and the News Media," in Nimmo and Sanders op. cit., pp. 445-465.

21. Jay G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, "Politicians and the Press: An Essay on Role Relationships," in Nimmo and Sanders op. cit., pp. 467-493. See also, George A. Donohue, Clarice N. Olien and Phillip J. Tichenor, "A 'Guard Dog' Conception of Mass Media," paper presented to the AEJMC annual convention, San Antonio, August 1987.

22. Bernard C. Cohen, The Press and Foreign Policy (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963),

23. Carl R. Bybee and Mark Comadena, "Information Sources and State Legislators: Decision-Making and Dependency," Journal of Broadcasting, 28:333-340

(1984).

24. Jewell op. cit. describes two "styles" of representation typical of the image most legislators attempt to project to constituents: the "trustee" who follows his own judgment, knowledge and understanding; and the "delegate" who, in effect, "takes instructions from constituents" (p. 95).

25. Unwillingness to acknowledge influence is ironic, given the overwhelmingly positive ratings lawmakers typically give to those who seek deliberately to influence policy: lobbyists and special interests groups. See fn. 1 supra and Riffe op. cit.

26. Abrams and Hawkins, op. cit.

27. Phillip J. Tichenor, George A. Donohue and Clarice N. Olien, Community Conflict and the Press (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1980); Donohue, Olien and Tichenor, "Local Power, The Press & The World Outside," paper presented to the Midwest Association of Public Opinion Research, Chicago, November 1982; and Donohue, Olien and Tichenor, "Leader and Editor Views of Role of Press in Community Development," Journalism Quarterly, 62:367-372 (1985).

28. Morris Janowitz, The Community Press in an Urban Setting (New York: The Free Press, 1952); Clarice N. Olien, George A. Donohue and Phillip J. Tichenor, "The Community Editor's Power and the Reporting of Conflict," Journalism Quarterly, 47:472-478 (1968); Alex Edelstein and J. Blaine Schulz, "The Weekly Newspaper's Leadership Role as Seen by Community Leaders," Journalism Quarterly, 40:565-574 (1963).

29. Considered "part-time" legislators and lacking any appreciable administrative staff, these legislators may be more attuned to competing information channels than full-time legislators whose staffs collect, summarize and filter news of public concerns.

30. The instrument was pilot tested with public officials in Illinois, as

detailed in Daniel Riffe, Elijah Akhahenda and Kristen Dollase, "'Local' Public Officials, the News Media, and Other Channels: Is Channel Perception Unidimensional?" Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, 1984.

31. The information types included: "what issues are on the mind of your own constituents"; "what issues are on the mind of the general public"; "what's happening in Montgomery, specifically in state government" or "statehouse" news; and information "useful in helping you make decisions in your job."

32. The news media were compared to other sources for these and other types of information needs in Riffe, op. cit..

33. See fn. 30, supra.

34. Donohue, Olien and Tichenor (1982, 1985) op. cit.

35. Edelstein and Schulz, op. cit.

36. Operationally, converting an individual subject's raw agreement scores to index scores involves summing--across all the variables defining a particular factor--the subject's standardized score (raw score subtracted from group mean and the remainder divided by the standard deviation) multiplied by the variable's factor score coefficient. See Marija J. Norusis, Advanced Statistics: SPSS/PC+ for the IBM PC/XT/AT (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), pp. B.61-B.62.

37. See Riffe, op. cit., and "The Surrogate Constituency? The Press, the Public, and the Legislative Office in Alabama." Paper presented at the Citadel Symposium on Southern Politics, Charleston, S.C., 1986.

38. Despite problems of unrepresentativeness accompanying the "organized mail" phenomenon, volume of mail from constituents is an important variable in political communication scholars' work on representation and responsiveness. See Jewell, op. cit. for discussion.

Table One

Mean News Media Usefulness Ratings by Alabama Legislators
for Four Types of Professional Information
(1=not useful, 5=very useful)

Usefulness of: For:	News Media in General	Newspapers	Television	Radio
Issues on Minds of Constituents	3.38	3.38	3.09	3.05
Public Opinion	3.71	3.67	3.44	3.30
Job Decisions	2.61	2.60	2.37	2.30
What's Happening Around Capital	3.61	3.73	3.28	2.96
(n=)	(77)	(78)	(78)	(79)

Loadings of Information Type on One-Factor Solutions[a] for
Each News Media Source

	News Media in General	Newspapers	Television	Radio
Issues on Minds of Constituents	.88	.91	.86	.89
Public Opinion	.83	.89	.84	.87
Job Decisions	.71	.79	.55	.59
What's Happening Around Capital	.80	.79	.79	.80
EIGENVALUE	2.62	2.87	2.37	2.54
% VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR	66	72	59	63

[a] To summarize for each source the usefulness ratings on the four types of information, principal components analysis was conducted for each information source. In all four cases, results indicated a single factor could summarize the ratings.

Table Two

Mean and Percentage Agreement of Alabama Legislators on
News Media Role/Performance Items
(1=agree, 5=disagree)

'The News Media are Adversaries' Items	mean	% agree
The local news media are sometimes critical of the actions of local public officials and local government.	1.82	93
The local news media sometimes get involved in issues that are best left to the decision-makers.	2.56	55
Much of the investigative reporting by local news media is little more than snooping for sensational news.	2.44	61

'The News Media are Consensus Agents' Items	mean	% agree
The local news media are a good source of information about the interests and concerns of community leaders and influentials.	2.78	54
The local news media seldom really reflect the public's concerns about local issues.	3.17	30
In general, the local news media help the public reach a consensus about which way to go on a particular issue.	2.41	71
When there are opposing positions on issues, the local news media generally do a good job of presenting both sides.	3.39	30
	(n =)	(80)

Table Three

Loadings of News Media Role/Performance Items[a]
on Single-factor Solutions
(n=80)

'The News Media are Adversaries' Items	Loading
The local news media sometimes get involved in issues that are best left to the decision-makers.	.82
The local news media are sometimes critical of the actions of local public officials and local government.	.70
Much of the investigative reporting by local news media is little more than snooping for sensational news.	.69
EIGENVALUE	1.63
% VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR	54.30

'The News Media are Consensus Agents' Items	Loading
The local news media are a good source of information about the interests and concerns of community leaders and influentials.	.84
The local news media seldom really reflect the public's concerns about local issues.	.81
In general, the local news media help the public reach a consensus about which way to go on a particular issue.	.70
When there are opposing positions on issues, the local news media generally do a good job of presenting both sides.	.57
EIGENVALUE	2.16
% VARIANCE ACCOUNTED FOR	54.10

[a] To summarize each set of items, agreement scores were subjected to principal components analysis. Item scoring was first adjusted so that high scores would indicate greater belief that the local news media were performing as adversaries or agents of consensus. For both sets of items, results indicated a single factor could summarize the data.

Table Four

Zero-order Correlations of Media Usefulness Indexes with Press Role Indexes, Media Exposure Variables, Constituent Communication Variables, and Demographic and Tenure Variables

(product-moment correlations; n=80)

	Usefulness Index Score for:				Role Index:	
	News Media in General	Newspapers	Television	Radio	Adver.	Consens.
Role Index Score						
"News media are..."						
Adversaries	-37***	-43***	-21*	-09	---	-50***
Consensus Agents	54***	58***	28**	12	-50***	---
Media Orientation (used "yesterday")						
Total Media Used	17	17	27**	21*	04	02
Print Media Used	17	19*	16	11	-09	07
Broadcast Media Used	10	09	24*	20*	12	-03
Cosmopolitan Media	17	15	19*	09	-10	10
Local Media Used	11	12	23*	23*	15	-07
Constituent Communication Behaviors						
Personal Constituent Contact						
at Capital	-19*	-24*	-01	0	19*	-23*
at Home Office	-27**	-19	0	0	27**	-38***
Phone Constituent Contact						
at Capital	-11	-17	08	08	21*	-31**
at Home Office	-15	-14	08	11	08	-42***
Constituent Letters Per Week	24*	23*	18	31**	-13	-02
Demographic and Tenure Variables						
Years in Elected Office	14	16	07	22*	18	06
Age	12	24*	13	22*	-07	09
Years of Education	04	-07	-01	02	08	-02

* $p<.05$

** $p<.01$

*** $p<.001$